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PRESS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education to Continue Successful USAID Program for Training Unemployed Youth

COLOMBO, March 27, 2009 – On March 20 the Ministry of Education announced it will provide workforce readiness training to thousands of Sri Lankan youth, thanks to funding from the Asian Development Bank. The Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program, a program started with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will provide the training using a specialized curriculum that targets unemployed youth, ages 15 – 25.

High unemployment rates for youth who do not enter university continue to be a national concern. To better prepare young people to find jobs and be successful in their careers, the Ministry of Education considered a wide range of job skills programs, finally selecting the USAID-funded ASAP. The Ministry of Education chose ASAP because of its success in working with young people, especially school leavers, and its strong relationships with the private sector. ASAP's close collaboration with the private sector has ensured that the training curricula teaches the skills youth need most to be successful in the workplace.

Under the Asian Development Bank-funded Education for Knowledge Society Project (EKSP), Ministry of Education activities will empower selected students who have completed their Advance Level (A/L) exams and who come from economically disadvantaged families. ASAP will support the acquisition of post-secondary, career-oriented soft skills that are essential for finding gainful employment, especially in the emerging ICT and service sectors of the Sri Lankan economy. As 2009 is the "Year of Information Technology and English," EKSP will support successful initiatives in alignment with the Ministry's objectives to strengthen IT and language skills.

USAID, the development agency of the U.S. Government, provided \$2.4 million to launch the ASAP Program in 2006. Since then, ASAP has trained more than 8,000 unemployed youth in career success skills, with about 2,000 currently employed or participating in apprenticeships. This high-quality program will continue to help more youth in Sri Lanka.

“USAID is proud of what the ASAP Program has accomplished in training young people in the skills they need to find jobs and be successful in their careers,” stated Gerald R. Andersen, USAID Director, Office of Economic Growth. “We are especially glad that the Ministry of Education shares our excitement about this program. With this new partnership, thousands of young people will find good jobs, gaining financial independence that will benefit their families and communities,” he continued.

The ASAP Program focuses on building “soft” skills such as English language and computer literacy training, interviewing skills, good work ethic, and productive attitudes. Curriculum designers worked closely with the private sector to develop training programs so that youth are ready to step into the private sector successfully. ASAP also links trainees to employers and vocational training centers, especially in rural areas.

The ASAP Program was designed and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. in partnership with the International Youth Foundation and the Christian Childrens’ Fund.

The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided development and humanitarian assistance in developing countries worldwide for nearly 50 years. Since 1956, USAID/Sri Lanka has invested nearly \$2 billion to benefit all the people of Sri Lanka.

For more information about the ASAP Program, contact ASAP Chief of Party, Shevanthi Jayasuriya at ShevanthiJ@caii.com or Sylvia Ellison, Senior Associate and ASAP Project Director at SylviaE@caii.com.

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With funding from the Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Education will train thousands of young people on the soft skills needed to find jobs in the private sector. With funding from USAID, the Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program has trained 8,000 youth and school leavers.

Left to right: Sylvia Ellison – Project Director, ASAP, Gerald Andersen – Economic Growth Director, USAID, Shevanthi Jayasuriya – Chief of Party, ASAP, Nimal Bandara – Secretary, Ministry of Education, Anura Dissanayake – Project Director, Education for Knowledge Society Project



With funding from USAID, the ASAP Program trained 8,000 youth and school leavers in important skills such as IT, English language, and work ethics. Now with funding from the Asian Development Bank, the Ministry of Education will ensure thousands more young people receive training they need to be successful in the private sector.

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